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# THE RETREAT OF THE MOMONIANS, A.D. 138, ILLUSTRATED BY LOCAL TRADITION.

BY MR. D. BYRNE.

[*Read at the Meeting of March 6th.*]

I beg to direct the attention of the Society to an event vaguely recorded by history, but concerning which many vivid traditions are handed down from father to son amongst the peasantry of the district round Timahoe, in the Queen's County. According to Irish history, about the year after Christ, 138, and about 294 years before the Gospel was preached in Ireland, the Munster people invaded Leinster. At that period **Cu-chorb** (*Cu-chorb*) was monarch of that province. In order to repulse the invaders, *Cuchorb* assembled all his forces, and gave the chief command to **Luġaidh-Laighis** (*Lughaidh Laighis*), or Louis of Leinster, the son of **Laoghseach Ceann Mor**. This *Lughaidh Laighis*, or Louis of Leinster, was the most accomplished military man of his age; and in order to prove himself worthy of the confidence placed in him by the Leinster king, he pursued the Munster marauders, and came up with them at **Āt-truistean** (*Ath-truistean*), now *Athy*, in the county of *Kildare*, where he made an awful slaughter of the enemy, and compelled the survivors to re-pass the river *Barrow*, which was crimsoned by the blood of the slain. After this defeat the Munster army retreated toward their own province. They passed by **Cill-Cro** (*Cill-Cro*), or the Church of *St. Cro*, in the county of *Kildare*. They then came on their way through the lands of **Baile-an-Tobair** (*Baile-an-Tobair*), or the Town of the Well, now corruptly called *Ballintubrit*, in the Queen's County; which part of Leinster, namely, the *Queen's County*, was known, in these remote ages, by the name of **Ceann-teine** (*Ceann-teine*), which signifies the Head or Hill of Fire, which was a proper appellation, being the only part of Leinster that then abounded with timber, and consequently affording much fuel. In *Ceann-teine* the Munster forces made a stand, and prepared for battle on a plain which was afterwards called **Āġ Riada** (*Magh-Riada*), or the Plain of *Riada*, now *Morett*, which anciently called the Great Heath of *Maryborough*. The Plain is now called **Tulac Ua m-Buidē**,\* (*Tullymoy*). There, according to tradition, a most dreadful battle took place, and in its commencement fell a Leinster chief called **Liagan** (*Liagan*); the *Lagenians*, his soldiers, interred him in the place on which he fell, and set up a pillar-stone as a memorial of his fame, his fall and remains. The stone is nine feet high, three feet broad, and two feet thick. The head of the chieftain rests towards the south, and his feet towards the north, probably a proof

\* See **Leabhar na g-Ceart** (*Leubhar na g-Ceart*), published by the *Celtic Society*, p. 214, n., where several families, districts, and localities in *Kildare* and the *Queen's Counties*, are traced by the editor, *J. O'Donovan, Esq., LL.D.*

that the deceased was a pagan. It is traditionally known as *Cloç L1A3A1N* (*Cloch Liagain*), or the Stone of Liagan. The combatants, as the battle raged, moved towards the south, so that they fought on a plain now called Knockglass, on which plain another chieftain fell, and over his remains also stands a pillar-stone. The west side of the stone is six feet, the north six feet, the east three feet, the east-by-south six feet, and the south three feet. This great and ponderous stone is four feet high. The townland must have taken its name from the name of the stone, *Cloç 3lar* (*Cloch Ghlas*), or the Green Stone. The combatants, as the battle continued, moved towards the north, so that the battle raged between the *Duns* of *Cloç-an-Púca* (*Cloch-an-Phuca*), and *Log-an-chorain* (*Log-an-chorain*), which signifies the Hollow of the Hook. From the *Duns* the combatants moved towards the south-west and came into Fallowbeg, where one of the distinguished Leinster chiefs fell. A pillar-stone, which now rests on its side, marks the place of his fall and interment. The plain on which he fell was called *Magh-aran-buidhe* (*Magh-aran-buidhe*), or the Yellow Field of Contention. The stone is seven feet long, three feet wide, and two feet thick. The stone fell in consequence of the earth being taken from it. The battle continued, and the brave antagonists moved towards the north: on the side of a valley in which runs a streamlet, another Leinster chief fell. A small pillar-stone marks the spot where his remains repose. The stone is three and a-half feet long, two and a-half feet wide, and one and a-half feet thick. The stone lies on its original front, having been cast down towards the north. About twenty-six yards from this stone, towards the north-east, is a spot of land which seems never to have been, by any cultivation, disturbed; a few dog-briars grow on the spot; it appears by tradition to have been formerly the site of a pillar-stone, consequently it is probable that another warrior must have fallen there.

The battle continued and raged through the townland of Orchard, at the north-west bounds of which another Leinster chief fell. A large pillar-stone marks the spot of his fall and repose. The stone is three feet and one-half high, and fourteen feet in circumference. The field in which the stone rests was called *Magh-na-cloiche-léithe* (*Magh-na-cloiche-leithe*), or the Plain of the Grey Stone; but is now corruptly called *Magh-na-3cloç-l1Aç* (*Magh-na-g-cloch-liath*).

The battle still continued, with equal fury, under *Cnocan-na-3-Cruac* (*Cnocan-na-g-Cruach*), or "the Hillock of the Ricks," and through Timahoe and Ballinaclough; on the west side of the *Rath* a dreadful slaughter was made, so that the remains of the slain can yet be discovered.

The human remains lay, and quantities of them still lie, about two feet and a-half under the surface of a level field; they rest on a stratum of gravel and stones. The remains lie promiscuously, so that a perfect skeleton has not been discovered. I extricated two thigh bones, the hips and spine, but when I came to the shoulders I found not the skull of the skeleton. When I commenced excavating, I found a skull

resting close against one of the thigh bones. The skull rested on the face; I gently removed the skull, but nevertheless it fell into pieces. The teeth rested on the gravel, but there were no remains of the under-jaw. I cannot say that this skull belonged to the skeleton which I first excavated; but sure I am, that the head was severed from its body.

About one foot from the skeleton, towards the south-east, I discovered two skulls, each with the face upwards. I carefully examined the earth over and under them, yet I could not discover even an under-jaw or upper-jaw, not even the teeth; they were about six inches apart. Nothing appeared more evident than that the heads were severed from the bodies, for no portion of a skeleton remained near them but two thigh-bones.

I laboured to preserve the skull from fracture, but I laboured in vain. These remains I have submitted to the inspection of A. Hobson, Esq., M.D., of the Timahoe Dispensary, and he has kindly furnished me with the following remarks:—

“I have carefully examined the portions of skulls which you left at the Dispensary. They present the following peculiar points, viz., oblong and flattened at the sides, the anterior part or forehead, remarkably narrow and receding; the occiput large, the base is wanting, and also the inferior maxilla. The teeth have nothing remarkable about them. I have no doubt the skulls belonged to persons who lived at a very remote period, and that they were preserved (although in an imperfect state) by the absorbing nature of the sand in which you found them.

“A. HOBSON, M.D.

“Timahoe, March 2, 1850.”

Taking into consideration the foregoing particulars, there seems no real obstacle in supposing that the remains described belong to some of the Momonians who here fell in their retreat.

In Ballinacloagh, or properly, *Baile-na-g-Cloic* (*Baile-na-g-Cloch*), “the Town of the Stones,” fell another chief; a pillar-stone marked the place of his repose, but it was destroyed a few years past by the farmer who possesses the field on which it rested. The battle continued, and the combatants moved towards the south, and in the lands of Garryglass fell a Leinster chief; a pillar-stone, three feet high, four feet wide towards the east, four feet towards the south, and four feet towards the north-west, marks the place on which he fell, and in which his remains are deposited. *Garraíge Glas* (*Garry Glas*) signifies a Green Garden. After the fall of this chief, the Munster forces retreated, and passed through Cluntycoe and Blandfort. When they came into Rathmoyle, the Leinster army attacked them again on a hill called *Druim Scilla Mhóir* (*Druim Skilla Mhagh*), or the Hill-field of Loss; on this field a Leinster hero fell. Two large pillar-stones and three small ones mark the fall and the “narrow house” of the Leinster chieftain. The stone towards the south, is four feet broad, and is six feet high. The stone

towards the north is three feet wide, six feet in height, and, as the other stone, two feet in thickness. One rests behind the other, and both face and lean towards the north, which renders it probable that the chieftain was a pagan, and that his head rests towards the south, and his feet towards the north. The chief must have been much renowned, and his fall much regretted; the number of stones here grouped together indicate such a fact, and the name of the field signifies it. The field is now corruptly called *Drum-Shelly*.

The Munster army continued the retreat until they came to *Slíge Dhalá* (*Slighe Dhála*,) Daly's Pass, there they made a stand and came to battle, in which they were completely vanquished by Louis of Leinster. The locality of this final conflict is called *Bealach-Mór-Ossory* (*Bealach-Mor-Ossory*), i.e. the Great Pass of Ossory, now Ballaghmore, in the Barony of Upper Ossory, in the Queen's County.

### SEPULCHRAL REMAINS.

The small but very beautiful Urn, represented on the opposite page, which was presented to the Museum by J. B. C. S. Wandesforde, Esq., measures four inches across the mouth, and two inches in height. The rim turns over very much, and the sides, which are ornamented by fluting, form a very graceful and almost classical curve. The circumstances of its discovery are detailed in the following communication, received from Richard Cooke, Esq. :—

“*Castlecomer, April 27th, 1850.*

“Sir,—Mr. John Wandesforde has requested me to send you the particulars respecting the Urn found some time ago near here. I have taken down the following statement from the men who found it, and would feel happy to make any other inquiries you should deem necessary, from the parties.

“The Urn was found on Andrew Kennedy's land, Mayhora, parish of Castlecomer, about three miles from the town of Castlecomer, and on the Hon. Mr. Wandesforde's estate. Having opened the breast or face of the quarry, the workmen discovered, about two feet from the surface, a flag two feet square, on which was laid a round earthen Vase *without a bottom*; a dry-built wall was round the Vase, and another flag was placed on the wall. This Vase contained the *Urn*, with the *bottom upwards*, and a quantity of small bones; but in removing the larger vessel it was, unfortunately, broken in pieces. Outside the circular chamber, formed by the dry-wall, a quantity of small bones, similar to those found in the Urn, was also discovered.

“I am, Sir, faithfully yours,

“RICHARD COOKE.

“The Rev. J. Graves.”

## ADDENDUM.

Page 229, after last line add—

Since the foregoing was in print I have been informed by the Rev. James Graves, that Ledwich has committed a twofold mistake in stating that the "*Sacri Lus*" was lost, and that the poems were composed by the young gentlemen of Kilkenny College. The volume in question is still to be found in Primate Marsh's Library, Class K. 3. Tab. 5. No. 9; and is entitled "*Sacri Lus* *In Vsum* Scholæ Kilkenniensis. Dublinii: Typis Regiis, & Venum dantur apud Josephum Wilde. c1o locL. \* \* \*". The date is defective, having been partly cut away by the binder. The book is in small quarto, and is imperfect, ending at p. 64; it consists of Latin poetry in elegiac measure, chiefly on Scripture subjects. On the fly-leaf is written, in an old hand, "Daniel Mead, ex dono Geo. Pigott." On the title, "Mich. Jephson"; whose library was purchased by Primate Marsh.

## CORRIGENDA.

- p. 117, l. 8, for "Anglesea" read "Anglesea".
- p. 133, l. 27, for "these" read "those".
- p. 142, l. 34, for "of" read "of".
- p. 148, note, l. 1, after "Phœnician" dele „.
- p. 157, l. 17, for "*Muillend*" read "*Muilend*".
- ib., l. 24, for "*Maelodron*" read "*Maelodran*".
- p. 164, l. 11, for "*Muilenu*" read "*Muilenn*".
- p. 174, l. 35, for "connection" read "connexion".
- p. 177, l. 9, for "*barry of four*" read "*four barrulets*".
- p. 182, l. 27, for "Edward" read "Edmond".
- p. 187, l. 31, for "twenty-four" read "fourteen".
- p. 191, l. 27, after "of" insert "the".
- p. 192, l. 37, after "tenure" dele „.
- p. 193, ll. 44, 45, for "two trefoil-headed niches" read "a shallow canopy".
- p. 195, ll. 14, 22, for "Sugard" read "Ingard".
- p. 198, l. 8, for "acre" read "Loftus acre".
- ib., l. 18, for "Ballymagin" read "Ballymagir".
- p. 200, l. 9, after "rain" dele „.
- p. 213, l. 39, for "meta" read "metal".
- p. 216, l. 34, for "Vol. I." read "Vol. II".
- ib., l. 35, for "*luaned*" read "*luued*".
- p. 222, l. 15, for "magnificent" read "magnificent".
- p. 240, l. 39, after "brothers" dele „.
- p. 260, l. 32, for "of Nassau" read "daughter of the first Duke of Beaufort".